

No 7

*The Divine Authority, and Usefulness,
of Ecclesiastical Censures, Asserted.*

I N A ✓
S E R M O N,
P R E A C H ' D A T
Totnes, in Devon,
M A Y The 17th, 1708.

At the VISITATION of the Reverend
D^R Francis Atterbury,
Dean of *CARLISLE*,
A N D
Arch-Deacon of *TOTNES*.

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JOHN XX. xxiii.

Whose soever Sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever Sins ye retain, they are retained.

IN this Chapter we have an Account of our blessed Saviour's appearing to his Disciples, on the same day on which he arose from the dead. Having shewn himself to *Mary Magdalen* in the Morning, at Evening, when the doors Ver. 19. were shut where the Disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews, He came and stood in the midst, and saith unto them, *Peace be unto you.* And the End, we find, of his coming to them was, not only to remove their Doubts and their Fears; and to confirm their Faith, which had begun to waver, by shewing unto them his Hand and his Side; but likewise to constitute them his Ambassadors to an unbelieving World: To make them his Substitutes, who were to carry on that great Design for which the Father had sent him, and to supply his Room; First in Planting a Church, and then in Instructing

Ver. 21. *structing and Governing it. As my Father, saith he, hath sent me, even so send I you.*

And that such Men as they were, Men of very low Circumstances in the World, and utterly destitute of any secular Advantages; that such as these might not want Authority for the Business to which they were thus appointed, he conveys to them that which would be sufficient: *Having breathed on them, he said, receive ye the Holy Ghost: And then he added, Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained.*

In Treating of this Power here given by our blessed Lord, I shall, with the divine Assistance, do these Four things:

- I. Enquire into the Nature of it.
- II. Consider the Persons to whom it is committed.
- III. Give some Account of the Ends for which it was bestowed. And,
- IV. Recommend that Regard which ought to be paid to it.

I. The

I. The first thing I am to do is, to Enquire into the Nature of this Power; the Power of *remitting, and retaining sins*. And that we may the better understand what it is, it may be proper distinctly to consider both the Branches of it.

As for the *First* of them, the Power of *remitting sins*, the least that can possibly be understood by it is, the Power of declaring the Pardon of Sin to all that believe the Gospel, and are truly penitent. Some of those, who have labour'd most to lessen the Authority given by Christ to his Church, cannot but, in this sense, allow the Officers appointed by him, to be *the Ministers of Reconciliation*; and to have it in Commission from him, thus *to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and to set at liberty them that are bruised*.

There can be as little doubt, I think, whether the Ministers of Christ have not a peculiar Right of interceding for the Pardon of those who make Profession of a sincere Repentance. This was annex'd to the Priestly Office under the Law; those that Ministred in Holy Things being Solemnly to pray over Offenders, and their Trespases were thereupon remitted: *The Priests, the Ministers of the Lord*, were by God's Appointment,

Joel 2. ment, to weep between the Porch and the Altar,
 17, 18. and to say, spare thy People, O Lord; and his Pro-
 mise thereupon was, to be *jealous for his Land*,
 and to *pity his People*. And the Assurance given
 here by our Blessed Saviour to his Disciples, will
 not suffer us to doubt, but that he convey'd a
 Power equal to this, under the Gospel. As St.
 James directed the Calling for the *Elders of the*
 Jam. 5. Church to pray over the sick Person, he adds,
 15. that if he had committed sins, they should be forgiven
 him: And when Simon Magus was convinc'd
 by St. Peter and St. John, that he was in the gall
 of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity; the
 Act. 8. sense he had of their divine Commission prompt-
 24. ed him to say to them, *Pray ye unto the Lord*
for me.

But besides such a declaratory, and petitionary
 Absolution, the Officers of Christ, by virtue of his
 Grant, have a Title to the pronouncing that which
 is Judiciary too. As they can Authoratively de-
 clare, that those who are qualified for Pardon,
 according to the evangelical Covenant, shall cer-
 tainly have it; and as their Prayers over the
 humble and the penitent are, by divine Appoint-
 ment, peculiarly effectual for obtaining Remis-
 sion; so when they make a particular Enquiry
 into the State of the Broken-hearted, when they
 view their Sorrows, and hear their Vows, and
 find

find Reason to be satisfied of the Sincerity of both, they have it in Commission from Christ to administer Comfort, by speaking Peace in his Name : They can say to every such Person, upon his hearty Confession, as *Nathan* did to *David*, *the Lord* ^{2 Sam.} *hath put away thy sin.* Certainly such a Power ^{12, 13.} as this is very expressly contain'd; in this Promise of our blessed Lord, *Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them* : Whensoever a Person thoroughly sensible of his Sins, and weary of the burthen of them, comes unto the Stewards of Christ's Mysteries ; they can, by his Authority, dispense Mercy according to the Tenour of the evangelical Covenant : They can, as Ambassadors for Christ, give Assurances of Peace, and Comfort him whose Soul is thus afflicted with such words as these ; thy Transgressions are done away, and thy Sins forgiven.

From this short View of the Power of *remitting sins*, here given by our Saviour to his Apostles, we may easily perceive too the Nature of that other Branch of the Authority they receiv'd from him, the Power of *retaining sins*, it being contrary to the former. As the Officers of Christ are in some cases *the Saviour of life unto life* ; so in others they are *the Saviour of death unto death* : Instead of discharging Offenders from ^{2 Cor.} ^{2. 16.} the

the Guilt of their Sins, they bind it fast upon them for the Judgment of the great Day. They
Rom. 1. 18. declare the wrath of God against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of Men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness: And more than this, where they meet with Obstinacy and Perverseness in Sin, they note the Offender for a hardened Impenitent, unworthy of the Society of Believers: They deprive him of those Priviledges which belong to the Members of the Body of Christ, and of the blessed Hopes and Expectations which are peculiar to them: They drive him from the Altars of God, and the Places of his Worship, as a leprous and polluted thing; they shut him out from those Assemblies where Christ hath promised to be graciously present, and from that divine Influence which attends his Ordinances, and leave him to the Fruits of his own corrupt Ways, amongst Reprobates and Infidels.

Thus then we see that the Authority here given by Christ, *to remit and retain sins*, relates not only to the ordinary Ministrations of Religion, wherein the divine Mercy is convey'd to some, and with-held from others, according to their different Qualifications; but to the Discipline of the Church against scandalous Offenders, in which respect alone I shall now consider it.

When

When any Christian falls into notorious Sin, if upon Admonition he becomes truly penitent, and doth what is necessary for declaring his hearty Sorrow, and his Resolution of Amendment; those who are intrusted with this Power, accept of the Reparation he thus makes for the Scandal given, and thereupon acquit him. But if such an Offender continues obstinate and perverse, if he still loves his Sin, and will not be reform'd, the Sword of Excommunication is drawn against him, that he may be cut off from the Church, and all the Blessings of the true Members of it. And yet the Sentence thus pronounc'd, is not irreversibile; but there is still a Place for Repentance: And if that at length appears to be sincere, the Sin that was retain'd is remitted, and the Offender restor'd again to the Priviledges from which he fell.

That our Blessed Saviour, after he arose from the Dead, invested his Disciples with such a Power as this; a Power of Absolving the Penitent, and separating the Impenitent, by Ecclesiastical Censures, appears further from hence, that he had promis'd this very Power before his Crucifixion. When he declar'd unto *Peter*, that he would so firmly build his Church, that *the Gates of Hell should not prevail against it*, he assur'd him of a Divine Gift, which would be very effectual

Mat. 16.
19.

al towards the Stability of it : *I will give unto thee the Keys of the Kingdom of Heaven ; and whatsoever thou shalt bind on Earth, shall be bound in Heaven ; and whatsoever thou shalt loose on Earth, shall be loosed in Heaven.* And the Promise thus made to *Peter*, on the particular Occasion of his confessing him to be the Christ, was extended afterwards by our Saviour, to the rest of the Apostles : For, directing about the Measures to be observ'd when any Brother falls into a Fault, he gave the like Assurance to them all,

Mat. 18.
18.

Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on Earth, shall be bound in Heaven ; and whatsoever ye shall loose on Earth, shall be loosed in Heaven.

When our Blessed Saviour thus promis'd to confer this Power, he call'd it first, *The Keys of the Kingdom of Heaven* ; that is, according to the Paraphrase of *Theophylact*, τὰς τῆς σφαλμῶν ἢ συγχωρήσεως, ἢ ἐπιμνήσεως, the Power of Discipline, the Power of using those different Methods with Offenders, which their different States require : Of pardoning those who are Humble and Mortified, and of punishing the Hardened and Impenitent. *The Kingdom of Heaven*, doubtless signifies here, as it does in many other Places of the New Testament, the Kingdom of the *Messiah*, the Church of Christ, which is intitled to Heaven as the Metropolis of it whilst Militant

Militant here, and shall be triumphant in it hereafter. And to have *the Keys* of this Kingdom can mean no other thing, than to have the Authority of Stewards, to open and shut the Doors of it, as there shall be Opportunity, and as Necessity requires. Whensoever they meet with those who are so qualified, as the Rules of this Society exact, the Door is open'd to them, and they have all the Priviledges of Genuine Members: But those who despise the Laws of this Holy Community, and become the Spots and the Blemishes of it, are to be turn'd out of it, and to have the Door shut against them.

Our Saviour also, when he promis'd to give this Power, call'd it that of *Binding and Loosing*; giving Assurance at the same time, that what was done of this kind by his Commission here below, should be ratify'd above: *Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth, shall be bound in Heaven; and whatsoever ye shall loose on Earth, shall be loosed in Heaven.* By *whatsoever*, in this Place of Scripture, most Interpreters understand, *What Person soever*; it being common in the New-Testament, and indeed in other Books, in such a manner to exprels Things, when Persons are understood. So that, according to this Interpretation, the Meaning of our Saviour's Promise is, That whensoever his Stewards here on

Earth, shall treat an Obstinate Sinner as a Malefactor, putting Spiritual Chains or Bonds upon him, and, as it were, imprisoning him for the Judgment of the Great Day; the Sentence, they thus justly pronounce, shall be valid, and firm, as if it proceeded from the Mouth of Christ himself; the Condemnation of such an Offender shall be ratified in Heaven. And, on the other Hand, that when a Transgressor becomes sensible of his Madness, declaring an hearty Sorrow for his past Sin, and a Resolution of Amendment; and the Officers of Christ shall thereupon loose him from those Chains; the Absolution thus regularly given, shall be of force, as receiving Confirmation from the Great Judge of all the World. But now others there are, who by the Word, *Whatsoever*, in this Promise, will have Things to be understood, and not Persons; and therefore say, That not the Sinner, but his Sin, is the Subject of this *Binding and Loosing*. And indeed, admitting this, the Sense to any Indifferent Man, will appear much the same: *Whatsoever Sins ye shall bind on Earth*; that is, for which you shall declare the Offender bound to punishment, shall be held as bound by me in Heaven: And *whatsoever Sins ye shall loose*; that is, acquit or pardon, shall be loosed or pardoned by me in Heaven.

This

This Power of Discipline, which I have briefly explain'd, is so expressely both promis'd, and bestow'd, by our Blessed Lord in the Gospel; that the Attempts of those who deny it, seem to savour as much of Confidence, as they do of Irreligion. Not to say any thing of the Method made use of by *Erastus*, soon after the beginning of the Reformation, to disprove this Power; a very learned Man of our own Nation has bestow'd many Words, and a great deal of Reading, in endeavouring to make out, that *Binding* signifies no more than declaring Unlawful; and on the contrary, that *Loosing* is nothing else but declaring Lawful *. And the Author of some Annotations, by way of Supplement to an excellent Writer on the *New Testament*, by Force of Criticism would prove, that not only the Power of *Binding* and *Loosing*, but also of *Retaining* and *Remitting Sins*, is only in other Words, that of inflicting Diseases and healing them †. But can any Indifferent Person be persuaded, that such Senses as these do at all agree with our blessed Saviour's Words, or answer the Design on which he spake them? Certainly these

* *Selden* de Synedrims, Lib. 1. Cap. 9. Annotations on *John* 20. 23.

† Monsieur *Le Clerc's*

these Men might have spar'd all the Pains they have been at, in Interpreting away the obvious and plain Sense of these Places of holy Scripture ; and to as much purpose have taken the late more easy Method, of proving the *Christian Church* to have no such Authority ; namely, because it is not thought fit and convenient that it should have any.

II. The second thing I propos'd was, the Consideration of the Persons to whom this Power is committed. And who they were to whom our blessed Lord at first convey'd it, sufficiently appears from the Account St. *John* gives us of the Persons to whom his Words in the Text were directed ; namely, those Disciples of his, whom at the same time he advanc'd to the Dignity of Apostles ; those to whom he said, *As my Father sent me, even so send I you*. That order of Men whom he thus appointed his Substitutes on Earth, to plant and govern his Church, and those that were afterward to be admitted into their number, were intrusted by him with this divine Authority : As a King he gave unto these Rulers under him, the Power of Imprisoning and setting Free * :

And,

* Καθάπερ ὅτις βασιλεὺς ἀρχοντας ἀποσέλλων, ἐξουσίαν εἰς δεσμοφύγιον καὶ ἐμβαλεῖν καὶ ἀφίεναι δίδωσιν· ὅτω καὶ τέτοις ἐκπέμπων, ταύτη περιβάλλει τῇ δυνάμει.
S. Chrysost. Hom. 86. in Joan. Oper. Tom. II. P. 924. Edit. Savil.

And we find, that as Occasion was offer'd, they diligently made use of it.

That the *Apostles* exercis'd this Power, is manifest from several undoubted Instances of their Practice, Recorded in Holy Scripture. I shall put you in mind of these two; The Excommunication of *Hymeneus* and *Alexander*; And that of the *Incestuous Corinthian*.

Hymeneus and *Alexander* having been convert-to *Christianity*, became Members of the Church of *Ephesus*; but notwithstanding their Holy Professions, the Corruption of their Hearts dispos'd them to Impurity in their Conversation, and also to *Heresy*: *They put away a good Conscience, and concerning the Faith, made shipwrack*. And the *Apostle* gives the following Account of his Proceedings against the scandalous Offenders: *I have, saith he, delivered them unto Satan, that they may learn not to blaspheme. He delivered them* 1 Tim.
1. 20.
unto Satan, that is, he cast them out of the Church, which is under the peculiar Dominion and blessed influence of the Prince of Peace, and left them to the World, where Satan leads Men Captive according to his will; being, as our Saviour calls him, the Prince of it. And he thus deliver'd them to Satan, *that they might learn not to Blaspheme*: That by this holy Discipline, they might

might at length be Reform'd both from their Corrupt practices and wicked Errours, which were so dishonourable to Religion; and with a just Abhorrence of their Crimes might return again, to beg the Pardon of God, and the Peace of his Church.

The other Instance I mentioned, of the Exercise of this Authority; was the Apostles dealing with the *Incestuous Corinthian*. It is reported, saith he, in his first Epistle to the Church of Corinth, *That there is Fornication among you, and such Fornication as is not so much as named amongst the Gentiles, that one should have his Father's Wife.*

1 Cor. 5. 1. This was the abominable Fact which a wretched Person amongst them was guilty of: And as he blames the Church there, because they had not, by the Authority already delegated to the Officers of it, immediately excommunicated him; so he gives Order, in the following Words, that it might be speedily done: *I, verily, saith he, as absent in Body, but present in Spirit, have judg'd already as though I were present, concerning him who hath done this deed; In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, when you are gathered together, and my Spirit with the Power of the Lord Jesus Christ; that is, and my Authority receiv'd from Christ being virtually with you, to deliver such*

a one unto Satan; or, as it is express'd in other Words in the same Chapter, *to put away from your selves that wicked person*; to cast him out as one under the just Wrath of God, and *not to keep company with him, no not to eat with him*. This dreadful Sentence had a due Effect upon that Offender; he became sensible of the Weight of the Divine Displeasure, and that brake his hardned Heart; he lamented his Crime, and doubtless resolv'd to forsake it: And upon these Indications of a sincere Repentance, what was thus Bound is to be Loosed; and the Sin that was Retain'd to be Remitted. St. Paul, in his other Epistle to that Church, declares the Punishment to have been sufficient, and that he now forgave the Criminal, *ἐν παραστάσει Χριστοῦ* in the Stead of ^{2 Cor. 2. 10.} Christ, and as Acting by His Authority; and accordingly orders him to be comforted by a speedy Notice of his Absolution, *lest perhaps he should be swallowed up with over-much sorrow*.

Thus we find, that as this Power was committed by our Lord Christ to His Apostles, so they were Diligent and Faithful in the Use of it, as there was Occasion for it. And doubtless it was not intended, that it should be confin'd to them alone in their own Persons, and so end with them; but that it should be commu-
C ed

nicated to those, who were to Succeed them in the Care and Over-sight of the Church. As it was given to the *Apostles*, so also to the *Bishops*, who by Ordination became their Successors *. Some Miraculous Effects indeed followed often in the *Apostles* Times, upon their Execution of this Power, which were peculiar to that Age; but the Power it self was design'd to be continued in all Times of the *Christian Church*, as will be sufficiently manifest, if we consider these following Particulars:

1. That the *Apostles* directed the Use of it where they appointed *Pastors*.

2. That those *Pastors*, and their Successors, have made Use of it accordingly in every Age. And,

3. That it is what is very Agreeable to the Nature of such a Society as the *Christian Church* is.

First,

* Potestas peccatorum remittendorum Apostolis data est—& Episcopis qui eis Ordinatione Vicariâ Successerunt. *Firmilianus* in Epistola ad *Cyprianum* inter *Cypriani* Epistolas. P. 225. Edit. Oxon.

First, The Apostles ordred this Power to be made use of by them, to whom they committed the Government of the several Churches. As this is plain from the Account already given of the Incestuous *Corinthian*, so from many other Places of the *New Testament*: I shall Instance in Two or Three. *Timothy* was made *Bishop* of the Church of *Ephesus*, and that he had the Power of *Ecclesiastical Censures* there, appears from the Direction *St. Paul* gives him how to Exercise it; particularly in the Case of an *Elder*: ^{1 Tim. 5. 19.} Against such a One, said he, *receive not an Accusation but before two or three Witnesses.* Advice for the Management of this Trust, the same *Apostle* gives to *Titus* Bishop of *Crete*, as he Instructs him how to Act in case of *Faction* and *Division*: *An Heretick*, that is, as the Word, I think, is to be understood in that Place, the ^{Tit. 3. 10} Leader of a New Sect, *after the first and second Admonition, reject.* And our Blessed Lord supposes this Power in the *Angel*, or Bishop, of the Church of *Pergamos*; where he blames him for the Neglect of it, in not Excommunicating Offenders: *I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the Doctrine of Balaam.* — *And those that hold the Doctrine of*
the

the Nicolaitans, *which thing I hate.*

And,

Secondly, As the *Pastors* appointed by the *Apostles*, receiv'd this Power from their Hands, so they, and their Successors, have made Use of it accordingly in every Age. This is abundantly Confirm'd by almost all sorts of *Christian Writers*, for the several Times in which they liv'd, both before and since the *Empire* became *Christian*. I shall only Cite the Testimonies of Two, and those in the first of these Periods; one of the *Latin* and the other of the *Greek Church*; which alone are sufficient to make out, that this Power is owing neither to the Grant of *Christian Princes*, nor to the Usurpation of Corrupted Times.

In the next Age after that of the *Apostles* liv'd *Tertullian*; and he, in his *Apologetick for the Christian Religion*, which was then every-where cruelly Persecuted, giving an Account of the Assemblies of those that adher'd to it, hath these Words: *Ibidem etiam Exhortationes, Castigationes, & Censura Divina* *; There also are Exhortations, Reproofs, and the Divine Censure:
And

* *Tertulliani Apologeticus*, Cap. XXXIX. P. 31. Ed. Paris. 1675.

And he adds an Explanation of this last, *Nam & Judicatur magno cum Pondere, &c.* For they Judge with great Weight, as it becomes those that are assur'd of the Presence of God: And if any Person hath so Transgress'd, that he is driven by them from Communion, *summum futuri Judicii præjudicium est*, it is a strong Presumption of his being Condemn'd at the Last Day.

In a few Years after *Tertullian*, *Origen* began to be famous at *Alexandria*, and a very full Account he gives of the Exercise of this Authority, in his admirable Defence of *Christianity* against *Celsus* the *Heathen*: Speaking of the *ἐλάσµινοι πρὸς τὸ φιλοπύσσειν τοὺς βίους **, the Persons appointed to make a diligent Enquiry into Peoples Lives; that is, the *Bishops* and their Substitutes in the Government of the *Church*, he adds these Words: "How severe is their Discipline towards Sinners, " especially those who have Polluted themselves " with Lust, whom they drive from their Assembly? The School of *Pythagorean Philosophers* us'd to erect Monuments for such as " forsook them, esteeming them as dead: And " so the *Christians* mourn over those who have
C * " been

* *Origines contra Celsum*, Lib. 3. Pag. 142. Edit. *Cantabr.* 1677.

“ been overcome by Lust, or any other Crime,
 “ as Persons dead to God; and after this, if they
 “ give sufficient proof of their Penitence and A-
 “ mendment, they undergo a Trial longer than
 “ that before their first admission into the *Church*;
 “ and this being completed, they are re-admitted,
 “ as People rais’d from the Dead.

And as this Power was thus convey’d by the
Apostles, and thus made use of by their Succes-
 fors, so,

Thirdly, It is very Agreeable to the Nature of
 such a Society as the *Christian Church* is. All
 Societies in general seem to claim a Power of this
 kind, as a thing necessary to the Peace, Order
 and Preservation, of them. Those who have the
 Rule in any Corporations, or even in Families,
 believe that it belongs to them to admit to the
 Priviledges of their respective Societies, and to
 turn out such as will not observe the Laws of
 them. But especially where the Union hath been
 on Grounds of Religion, such a Power hath been
 held, upon other Accounts also, to be very fit,
 and hath been accordingly exercis’d. That the
Jewish Church made use of it, and that too in
 all likelihood by Divine Right, appears not on-
 ly from their own Writers, but from the Word
 of

of God: And that a sort of Excommunication was in use amongst the ancient *Greeks* and *Romans*, and even some *Barbarous Nations*, is easily, and hath been abundantly, made out by several Learned Men *. And now, if this Power be so Agreeable to the Nature of Societies, and particularly of such as are Religious, can we think that when Christ gave it, as we have seen he did, to the Governours of his Church, he gave it only for a certain Season? Can we imagine that when he bestow'd a thing which will be fit for all Times, he did not design it for all Times, even to the End of the World? Our Blessed Saviour gave His *Apostles* Authority, by a Solemn Rite, to receive Members into His Church upon such and such Conditions, which some of the Fathers have understood to be One Act of this Power of Forgiving Sins †: And it cannot be deny'd, but that this *Authority* was intended to continue for ever. And is there not the same Reason for the Continuance of a Power to Censure such Members as will not Observe the Conditions on which they were thus admitted,

* Dr. Hammond, *Of the Power of the Keys*, Cap. 6. Sec. 6. Dr. Comber, in his *Discourse of Excommunication*, Cap. 1. Sec. 2. † Cyprianus, *Epistola ad Iubaianum*, Pag. 201. Cyrillus *Alexandrinus*, *Oper.* Tom. 4. Pag. 1101. Edit. Paris, 1638.

ted, and even to cast them out again upon their Obstinacy and Impenitence? Certainly if the Officers of Christ have a Power, as confessedly they have, to Admit upon Terms, they can Exclude upon Non-performance of those Terms. If they have still a Right to seal the Pardon of Sins to them that Believe and Repent; they have also still a Right to shut the Door of this Mercy against those who fall off from their Vows, and make Shipwrack of Faith and a good Conscience.

But that this Power of Discipline given by Christ to the Governours of His Church, was to continue for ever, will further appear from the Third thing I propos'd; which was,

III. To give some Account of the Ends for which it was bestow'd, which I now come unto. A late Writer declares that *Excommunication, ever since the Clergy have claim'd an Independent Right to it, has been most Instrumental for the Advancing the spiritual Kingdom of Darkneſs* *. An Assertion that would appear very strange in him, were he not guilty of many more of the same Strain: For what can be said more Dishonourable to Christ,

* *Rights of the Christian Church*, Pag. 86. Edit. 2.

Christ, who, as we have seen, committed to his Ambassadors the Power of Discipline ; and who doubtless had in view the Best, and Wisest Ends, in all his Institutions. There is nothing indeed so good, and so well contriv'd, but that it is capable of being abus'd by Corrupt Men ; and so this Authority sometimes hath been : But the due and regular Use of it is serviceable to the most excellent Purposes ; as I shall briefly shew, with relation to the Church of Christ in general, and to Offenders in particular.

1st, The Exercise of this Authority, is a thing of great Advantage to the Church of Christ in general ; because it serves to promote, both the Purity, and the Honour of it.

Our Blessed Saviour design'd his Church, to be *a chosen Generation, a royal Priesthood, an holy Nation, a peculiar People* : And what likelier Method was there, to preserve it in its genuine Purity, than to throw out every Corrupt Thing, and whatsoever Defileth ; to seclude the Leprous from an Opportunity of infecting Others, and to cut off rotten Members, lest they should endanger the Health, and Life, of the whole Body ? As the Apostle St. Paul order'd the Incestuous *Corinthian* to be punish'd in this manner ; he put

D the

1 Pet.
2. 9.

1 Cor.
5. 6.

the Person he wrote to, in mind of the Fitness of it, in these Words, *Know ye not that a little Leaven leaveneth the whole Lump.* Wickedness disregarded, soon obtains a kind of Authority, which makes it easily clos'd with : But when it is pointed out as an Object of Shame, and Detestation, it puts People on their Guard, and no Temptation can easily prevail against them. And principally on this Account no doubt it was, that such strict Rules were laid down by the Primitive *Christians*, against all manner of Conversation with Excommunicated Persons. By the *Apostolical Canons* it was provided, that none should receive such a Person, or at any time join so much as in Private Prayer with him, under the Penalty of being Excommunicated himself *. And a very learned Man assures us, from the Decrees of several Councils, and the General Practice of the Church, which he had diligently examin'd, That such Persons were not only driven from Religious Assemblies ; but that every Body despis'd, abhor'd, and fled away from them : That it was counted a Sin to treat, or make Bargains with them : That none* would Salute

* *Ἐὰν τις ἀνομιανίῳ καὶ ἐν οἴκῳ συνεύξῃ, ὅσῳ ἀποειζέσθω.* Canon. Apost. Nu. 10. vide etiam Can. 12.

Salute them, or call them Brethren: None would look on them, speak to them, or invite them to eat with them *. And indeed the Severities of this kind, which were exercis'd to prevent the Contagion of Sin, and to discourage the Practice of it, have a sufficient Foundation in those Directions of the same kind, which were given by the *Apostles* themselves: *I have writ-* ^{1 Cor.}
ten unto you, saith St. Paul to the Corinthians, ^{5. 11.}
not to keep company, if any Man that is called a
Brother, be a Fornicator, or Covetous, or an Ido-
later, or a Railer, or a Drunkard, or an Extor-
tioner, with such an One, no not to eat. And to
the *Thessalonians* he says, *We command you,* ^{2 Thes.}
Brethren, in the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ, ^{3. 6.}
that you withdraw your selves from every Brother
that walketh disorderly, and not after the Traditi-
ons which ye receiv'd from us. And Schisms and
Heretical Opinions being of the same Spreading
and Dangerous Nature, with the Immoral Pra-
ctices of the Persons before-mentioned; we have
also the like Exhortations with relation to them:
Now I beseech you, Brethren, saith St. Paul, mark ^{Rom. 16.}
them that cause Divisions and Offences, contrary to ^{17.}
the

* *Albaspinaus* de Veteribus Ecclesiæ Ritibus, Lib. 1. Observatio I.

2 John
10, 11.

the Doctrine ye have learned ; and avoid them. If there come any unto you, saith St. John, and bring not this Doctrine, receiue him not into your House, neither bid him God speed ; for he that biddeth him God speed, is Partaker of his Evil Deeds.

And as this Power of Centures, duly exerted, contributes to the Purity ; so likewise to the Honour of the Church. It becomes a just Vindication of it, from all the Crimes of those, who have pretended to be the Members of it. When the Guilty Person undergoes the Sentence he deserves, he then bears his own Reproach, but the Community is free. There will be Persons unclean, and polluted, of corrupt and scandalous Lives : But if such Persons are publicly renounc'd by the Society to which they belong, and cut off as dead Branches ; that Society throws off the Infamy which would otherwise stick to it, and justifies it self in the Eyes of all the World. It was the great Honour of *Sparta*, that none could be wicked in that City, and go unpunish'd : And it was the Glory of the *Christian Church* in the primitive Times, that no Corrupt Member could continue in the Communion, or preserve the Peace of it. The Spiritual Sword, which it constantly made use of
against

against obstinate Offenders, baffled all the Artifices of those that sought Occasion to Defame it ; and gave it a Name and Reputation, which at length prevail'd over all the Enemies of it. And,

2dly, The Exercise of this Authority aims at the great Advantage of Offenders themselves; namely, their Reformation and Happiness. It is excellently fitted to bring the guilty Person to a due sense of his Sins, and to make him perceive something of that dreadful Vengeance that is to punish them. St. Paul, speaking of this Authority, says, *that God had given it to them for Edification, and not for Destruction.* And when he ordred the Incestuous Corinthian to be delivered unto Satan, it was, he told them, *for the destruction of the Flesh, that the Spirit might be sav'd in the day of the Lord Jesus.* Certainly, notwithstanding all the Attempts that have lately been made, to prove the Discipline of the Church Inconvenient and Hurtful, he that shall but Duly and Impartially consider it, must doubtless confess it to be the most likely Method, to bring a hardned Sinner to Repentance. If any obey not our Word, note that Man, and have no company with him, saith St. Paul: And the Reason

son why they were to Censure and Reject such an Offender was, *that he might be ashamed*: That the sense of that Contempt, which he had now brought upon himself by his Evil Ways, might fill him with Confusion; & that Confusion, as it naturally leads to it, at length issue in a sincere Reformation. When he that hath been secure and unconcern'd in his Sins, begins to think of the Privileges he hath lost, and the State from which he is fallen; when he finds himself driven from the Courts of the Lord, and forsaken by his own familiar Friends; when he perceives that he is now become a kind of Monster, avoided by Men, and under the just Displeasure of an offended God; yea when he considers, that those who Judge in Christ's Stead, and by his Authority, have been forc'd, by his Obstinacy, to denounce Wrath against him, and, as it were, to consign him over as one fitted for Destruction, to ever-lasting Burnings; I say, when such a Person as this begins to make such Reflections, and if he hath any Thought at all, he cannot long forbear to make them: What Disorder of Mind will the sense of his present Condition then fill him with? What Shame will he have, what Fear, what vehement Desire; yea, what Revenge against himself? The dismal Apprehensions of his Apostacy,

cy, and of the Wrath that is to punish it, will not suffer him to rest, 'till by sincere Professions of his Sorrow and Repentance, he obtains again Admission to Pardon and Peace.

IV. Having finish'd the third thing, I now come to the fourth and last ; To recommend that Regard which ought to be paid to this Power : Which I shall do in a very few Words, and so make an End.

Since this Power of *the Keys* ; the Power of *Remitting and Retaining Sins*, was bestow'd by Christ ; and bestow'd for the most Excellent Purposes ; The Purity and Honour of his *Church*, and the Reformation of Offenders in it ; A Thing of such Moment ought certainly to be duly regarded : Particularly, the Consideration of the Author, and the Ends of it, should engage some to use it, and to use it well ; and it should teach others to promote the Exercise of it, as much as may be.

First, It should engage some to use it, and to use it well : I mean Those, whom the Commission of Christ hath made the proper Officers of it, and to whom they commit it, or any part of it, by Delegation. They who are Intrusted
with

with such a Power, doubtless are to manage it with Faithfulness; and a hearty Zeal for the Honour of God, and the Good of the Church. I hope that most of Those, to whom this Authority belongs in our Church, are sincerely dispos'd to make this Use of it: I am sure I may say, that this is indeed the Case amongst us of this Part of it. And it is much to be wish'd, that such good Inclinations were not oppos'd by so many Difficulties, so many Discouragements; which this corrupt Age hath already, and endeavours still to lay, in the way of it. But,

Secondly, The Consideration of the Author and Ends of this Power, should teach others to promote the Exercise of it as much as may be: To do what lies in them, that every notorious Sinner, professing Christianity, may be subjected to the Censures of the Church, for the Discouragement of Sin, and the Reformation of the Guilty. And something of this kind may be done by Those, who are appointed to enquire after, and to give an Account of, such Offenders; and something too by all other Christians.

Something of this kind may be done by Those, who are appointed to enquire after, and give an Account of, such Offenders. I mean Those in every

every Parish, who have it in Charge as a main part of their Duty, to make Presentments of this nature. Indeed an Opinion, that such Informations are not consistent with Friendship and Civility, disposes many to much Neglect in this matter: But such a Conceit is a great Mistake; it being one of the Highest Instances of True Friendship to any guilty Person, to make use of proper Methods to bring him to a due Sense of his Transgression, and so to recover him out of the Snare of the Devil. *Thou shalt not*, said God to *Moses*, *hate thy Brother in thine Heart: thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy Neighbour, and not suffer Sin upon him.* Not to rebuke a Neighbour when he falls into a Crime; or by the neglect of any proper Method for reclaiming him, to suffer Sin upon him, is, we see, to hate him in our Heart. Besides this, the Persons I am speaking of are under another Obligation to give due Notice of scandalous Offenders; namely, the Oath of God which is upon their Souls. And certainly that is a strange sort of Kindness which prompts a Man by the Guilt of Perjury to bring Damnation upon himself, because he will not interrupt another as he is going on to Damnation.

And then something of this nature may be done too, by all other *Christians*; namely, by

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endeavouring as far as they can, to remove all the Hindrances of *Ecclesiastical Discipline*. Some of these Hindrances indeed are much out of the Power of Ordinary People; but I shall mention two, against which their Hearty Endeavours may prove in some measure Effectual; Loosness in Conversation, and Division. That Corruption of Manners, that Licentiousness in Practice, and Contempt of serious Piety, which have so generally spread themselves amongst all sorts of People, who are call'd *Christians*; And those many *Schisms* and *Divisions* we have amongst us; as they are Highly Criminal in themselves, and bring Dishonour on the *Church of Christ*, so they have made the Power he gave of Censuring Offenders, almost utterly Impracticable. For if all the Unclean are to be punish'd, may it be said, where are the Clean? And if the Disorderly and Contumacious are cast out, they have a large Choice amongst the several *Parties* who are ready to receive them. These things have cut the Sinews of Discipline, and made the Force of it to be dispis'd.

As therefore we regard the Honour of the *Church*, and the Head of it, The Lord Christ; As we would desire that Guilt should be prevented, and the Guilty reform'd; In short, as we love the Souls of others, yea, our own, and are indeed willing

willing to promote the common Salvation ; Let us hate the Things which are both so Ill in themselves, and of so mischievous a Consequence. Let every one of us, in the first place, take due care of his own Conversation, and thoroughly purge out the old Leaven there. All kinds of Uncleanness let them not be once named amongst us, as becometh Saints ; and let us also be Followers of Peace, and walk in Love, as Christ also loved us. And having thus begun this good Work at Home, let us then see what we are capable of in the same kind Abroad ; according to the Advice of the *Apostle*, *Let us consider one another, to provoke to Love, and to good Works.*

Could they that pretend to *Christianity*, be brought to be thus affected ; Could such a Holy Zeal as this be kindled in all our Hearts ; we might at length hope, that Religion will gain the Esteem it formerly had, and the Methods it proposes for the Reformation of the World, have the Success for which they were design'd. Yea, we might then hope to see the *Church of Christ* again, a GLORIOUS CHURCH, not having Spot or Wrinkle, or any such thing : And that after all the *Contempt* that is now daily thrown upon it, the Name of it may become a Name of Praise and Joy, throughout the whole Earth.

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